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Aims and Forms of the Post-Graduate Training
of Doctors in the U.S.S.R.

by

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In the USSR there exists a stream-lined system of social maintenance, social insurance and medical service. Every man, whatever his age, race or residence, can obtain specialized medical aid free of charge. Naturally, all this can be achieved only when there is an efficient organization of post-graduate training: specialization and advanced training (improvement of qualification) for doctors, ensuring the constant, systematic advancement of specialized and general knowledge and at the same time providing for full material security of the physician.

In the USSR a doctor is a state employee entrusted with an honourable task of protecting public health. Therefore, the post-graduate training of doctors is organized and conducted by the government in accordance with the needs of the population.

Actually, specialization often begins in the early student days. Medical institutes prepare doctors for general practice. The students, however, are given every opportunity to extend their knowledge in the branch of science in which they are interested.

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For this purpose, student study circles are formed, in which various problems are studied.

After graduation post-graduate training of doctors is continued in conformity with a definite scheme. This scheme, with due regard to the real requirement of specialists and the availability of doctors in these parts of the country, is drawn up by the Ministry of Health of a given republic. After that it is coordinated and finally approved by the Ministry of Health of the USSR.

Specialization

A doctor's specialization begins after he has worked for three years in a district. This provides for a broader general and medical education and permits him to choose that specialty for which his practical knowledge best fits him. The solution of the latter problems is greatly facilitated by the institution of consulting physicians which is of great help to a district doctor. Thus to a considerable extent the danger of losing all contact with the human being-the patient - is diminished; the danger to which the physicians, who specialize without having sufficient life experience and general medical knowledge, are exposed.

The specialization of doctors in the main is carried out in the united municipal, regional and republican medical institutions.

The first advanced training institute for doctors in the world was organized by E. Eichvald in Petersburg in 1855. Here the first curricula and methods for various series of lectures and courses were elaborated. Thus a new independent system of specialization and advanced training for doctors was established in Russia.

At present in the USSR there are 11 advanced training institutes for doctors in which 1562 professors and teachers are employed.

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Besides, there are 6 faculties of advanced training attached to the medical institutes. During the last 40 years 390,000 doctors have gone through a course of training at these institutes. Annually, more than 27,000 doctors go through a course of post-graduate training (almost one out of ten).

Since 1947 there has been a marked increase of on the spot specialization without discontinuing work. The amalgamation of in-and out-patient clinics created especially favourable conditions for specialization in the process of the work itself. Thus the post-graduate training of doctors acquired a really mass character.

In the big amalgamation of municipal in-and out-patient clinics, in dispensaries and in various other hospitals the young doctors are going through the courses of specialization on a mass scale guided by experienced specialists. For this purpose a three year scheme of specialization is arranged in which are included a series of special theoretical and practical disciplines as well as subjects of general education, such as foreign languages and fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism.

These facilities are used also for the so-called primary specialization. This lasts 4 months and it is open for rural and regional hospital doctors who had already worked for a definite time in a rural area, who have had no specialization training but have proved to be good workers.

At present at the advanced training institutes for doctors specialization of doctors is conducted along more particular lines, such as anesthesiology, radiation hygiene, virology etc. For these courses specialists are selected who are interested in a given field and have a definite practical experience in it.

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Experience showed that the best prepared specialists came from among those doctors who had had a 2 or 3 years residency in some clinic or institute. However, it is not a mass system, but a prolonged and expensive system for the training of specialists. By developing and advancing this system we are preparing the personnel mainly for municipal and regional hospitals, as well as for other specialized institutions.

In the USSR from 1948 to 1956, 66,756 doctors completed specialization courses.

A certificate is granted on the completion of every course of specialization. The board of experts consists of a chairman who is a representative of the management of the institution in which the specialization was conducted, and of a member who is the chief specialist of the region or town.

Advanced Training

The aim of the advanced training is to improve the professional skill of a specialist who has already a record of service. Such a specialist is given every opportunity to acquaint himself with the newest achievements of science and technique. Doctors who are sent for advanced training must have at least a five years' record of service, including not less than two years of work in their own specialty. The principal institution for advanced training is the advanced training institute for doctors. Here a series of lectures on all specialties is organized. It lasts from 2 to 5 months. The best specialists of the country take part in the direction of these courses. For instance, the Central Advanced Training Institute for doctors in Moscow employs 97 professors. This institute has 3 faculties and 1 faculty for correspondence courses. It has more

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than 64 departments. Annually 4800 doctors take courses in the ordinary faculties and another 2500 - by correspondence.

It should be noted that all the workers in the Advanced Training Institute for Doctors are closely connected with the day-to-day work of the general practitioner because they take an active part in consultations, scientific conferences and congresses. Thus their work is based on the real need of the general practitioner and medical service.

While conducting the courses, special attention is paid to the following points:

1. To arouse the maximal independent activity of a student when he is working at bedside or in the laboratory, For this a student should spend about 70% of his working time.
2. To have a close connection between the studies and the work at the clinic.
3. To meet the individual requirements of a student as well as possible.
4. To achieve teaching of the main discipline coordinated with the adjacent branches of science.

The Advanced Training Institute for Doctors organizes courses of short duration, (4 to 6 weeks), on specific problems. These courses are organized for highly qualified specialists with the purpose of acquainting them with the newest achievements in the field in which they are interested. Such courses are organized on the problems of electrocardiography, roentgenology, diagnosis of precancer conditions, etc.

In 1947 correspondence courses for the executive personnel of the health service were organized in Moscow. The duration of the

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courses is 1 1/2 years. During this period of time students perform 6 control tasks and complete the courses with the final control task after a fortnight session in Moscow.

The practical value of this mass correspondence training of health service executive personnel is increased by the fact that all the control tasks are performed on the material of these institutions from which the students come as executives. Thus the theoretical knowledge obtained is immediately applied to practice.

In 1957 advanced training by correspondence for sanitary inspectors, epidemiologists and phthisiologists was begun.

On a reduced scale advanced training for doctors is conducted by means of fellowships. Here a physician, already a trained specialist in his own field, together with a record in research work, must pass an examination within 3 years in his own and two adjacent disciplines, in philosophy and two foreign languages, one of which he must know fluently. Later these doctors devote their lives mainly to teaching or research work. Quite a number of these, however, practise medicine. In some cases a doctor who is interested in research work is given a fellowship for a year with full material security.

In the complexity of measures for constant improvement of professional skill of physicians, conferences are regularly organized. These conferences are held once or twice a year, beginning on a regional scale and ending with all-union conferences and congresses. In these gatherings the broadest circles of the medical community take part; - from a rural physician to the prominent man of science. The agenda of these meetings are drawn up with due regard to the practical requirements of doctors and with a view of acquainting

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them with the newest achievements in the discussed problems.

A helping hand in the constant training of doctors is given by a highly organized network of medical literature which includes not only monographs, collections, magazines and newspapers but also magazines of the digest type.

Thus the post-graduate training of doctors covers a wide range of questions related to qualification and innovation.

In the USSR improvement in doctors' professional skill is a matter of national importance. The state budget bears the whole expense connected with the maintenance of the advanced training institutes for doctors, medical institutes, local facilities. The same goes for travelling allowances, student allowances, etc.. A doctor need not worry about who will replace him while he is absent. The state takes care of that.

Because of all this the system of post-graduate training for doctors is a popular one and on a mass scale.

In the USSR the aspiration of doctors for constant improvement of their professional skill is encouraged on a state scale. The free primary and subsequent specialization and advanced training, the introduction of certification in some specialties, (obstetrics, gynaecology, surgery), the possibility of going through the residence and fellowship serve here as an incentive.

All these arrangements do not suppress the private initiative of doctors or various medical bodies, but, on the contrary, encourage it. Priority is given to gifted and efficient physicians who have shown their worth in their work and to those individuals who receive recommendations of various scientific and medical institutions. Such recommendations also arise from personal contacts

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between doctors and collaborators of medical institutions. Such contacts are encouraged and they often give rise to the completion of research work by doctors on the spot. Some of these research works are later accepted as theses for higher degrees.

As our country continues to advance both culturally and economically, the forms of post-graduate training of our physicians will develop incessantly. However, we believe that even at this point we have approached and in the near future will achieve full harmony not only between a high type of specialization of the physician and his general medical education, but also a high cultural level and moral qualities.